

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RECOMMENDS HEALTH
PRECAUTIONS TO RESIDENTS DEPENDENT ON WELLS AND
SEPTIC SYSTEMS**

(Accomac, Va.)—The Virginia Department of Health urges residents dependent on wells and septic systems affected by a tidal surge or flooding to take extra precautions to protect their health.

“Floodwaters may contain fecal material from overflowing sewage systems and agricultural and industrial waste. Eating or drinking anything that has come in contact with contaminated water increases the risk for disease,” said Acting District Health Director David Chang.

Wells

People who rely on private wells for their water should consider their well contaminated if it was submerged or they believe it is possible the well became submerged during the hurricane.

If the well was flooded and underwater, the water should not be consumed until bacteriological testing indicates the well is not contaminated. Two samples taken on consecutive days are recommended. Contact the Eastern Shore Health District at (757) 787-5880, (757) 824-6211 or (757) 442-6228 for information on where to have samples tested.

If you are unsure if the well was flooded, assume that it was and use another water source until the safety of the well is confirmed. Disinfect your well by adding household bleach mixed with water to the well. The recommended amount of bleach varies depending on the amount of water in the well; however a half-gallon of unscented bleach should be adequate for most home wells. To be certain that your water lines have been disinfected, turn on the faucets until a chlorine smell is detected. Turn off the faucets and allow the bleach to sit in the well for at least four hours (overnight is preferable). The water should then be turned on until the chlorine smell dissipates.

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Water must be tested after this is done to ensure that the chlorine has destroyed bacteria. Heavy or continual contamination may not be controlled by a single chlorine treatment.

Until the well water is confirmed to be safe, water used for drinking, brushing teeth or cooking or preparing food should be either bottled water or water that has been boiled for a minimum of one minute.

Septic Systems

If flooding has occurred, homes may have a damaged or failing onsite sewage system. The system should be checked to determine if erosion has occurred or the system has been damaged. If any part of the system is exposed or appears damaged, people should contact their local health department to receive recommendations for proper corrections.

If the septic system has been flooded, sewage can back up into the home. This is more than just a serious nuisance. Sewage contains disease causing microorganisms. When cleaning up be sure to wear gloves, disinfect contaminated surfaces with diluted bleach water, and thoroughly wash yourself and your clothing immediately after cleaning.

If the septic system includes a pump chamber and pump, check to be sure the pump tank isn't allowing surface water to leak into the system. The excess water can easily overload the drainfield causing more expensive repairs. Contact the health department for guidance or a septic system contractor for repairs.

If the system is acting sluggish, this may be a normal reaction to saturated soils around the drainfield. Sewage leaving the septic tank may not be able to seep into the ground because the soil is already saturated. After a major rainfall event like a hurricane, it may take several days for the soils to drain and allow your system to return to normal. When the system is sluggish due to saturated soil around the drainfield, simply pumping the tank may not provide any improvement. Water will simply flow in reverse, filling the septic tank.

For more information, log onto the Virginia Department of Emergency Management Web site at www.vaemergency.com, or the Virginia Department of Health Web site at www.vdh.virginia.gov.

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